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Book Review

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BOOK REVIEW

THE POLITICS OF STATE EXPENDITURE IN ILLINOIS. By Thomas J. Anton
Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1966. Pp. 286, viii. \$6.75.

One of the hallmarks of the age in which we live is that when a gap in human knowledge appears, some dedicated individual will emerge and attempt to bridge that gap rather than submit to the limitations of continued ignorance. Perhaps it is the ready availability of funds for research studies that is responsible for this phenomena, perhaps it is popular stress on the acquisition of knowledge, or perhaps it merely represents an advance in the cultural level of mankind. But whatever the reason, it does occur and the book herein reviewed can well claim that parentage. Early in 1961, the State of Illinois developed a cash shortage; a financial crisis that held promise of mushrooming in the next biennium loomed on the horizon. The session of the General Assembly which was called upon to deal with these problems was described as "the most unruly session in memory"¹ by veteran newspaper reporters. And in all of this confusion, no one seemed to know just how or why decisions to spend state money were made. It was into this void that Mr. Anton bravely strode.

The author's *modus operandi* was to follow in great detail the process that produced the appropriation bills that were enacted by the 1963 session of the General Assembly. The time period studied commenced in the latter part of 1962 with the preparation of agency requests and continued up to the point where the expenditure authorizations had been shepherded through the legislature. The details exposed in this study were flavored by regular side trips into the realm of past performance through the medium of statistical compilations and interviews with officials who were veterans of the Springfield scene in an attempt to establish that the events of 1963 were not atypical. It appears that the author succeeded, at least to the extent that such limited excursions can be considered probative, but that is a judgment that each reader must, in the final analysis, make for himself.

In the analysis of the author, there are five functionaries which play a role in making decisions on how State funds are to be spent. The first of these is the Department of Finance, which institutes the process during the summer preceding each session of the legislature and serves as a mechanical catalyst thereafter. It furnishes the various agencies with appropriate forms for spending requests; these forms have rigid informational categories and the request is expressed only in monetary terms. They do, however, require a separate identification of spending requests for new activities or increased spending for existing activities. The second visible decision maker, the agency itself, was then examined by the author, particularly with respect to the Department of Mental Health. In this role, the attitude of the agency

seems to be that there is a vested interest in existing appropriations and, with respect to increments, the decision seems to depend more nearly on "what can be defended" rather than "what is needed."

After each agency prepares its requests, they are reviewed by the Department of Finance and then channelled to the Illinois Budgetary Commission. Although it has, and scrupulously maintains, a façade of power, it apparently has little. Its hearings are a travesty on serious deliberation and, significantly, it never has the total of spending requests before it at any one time. Its stress is only on dollars and not on agency functions and, to it, the fact of cutting spending requests is more important than the substantive nature of the activity cut.

The next step in the process is submission to the Governor where all spending requests are brought together for the first time and can be considered in the context of one another and compared with anticipated revenues. Some effective control, born of necessity, does exist in the Governor since he must present, at least in form, a balanced budget. And he has the veto power and the authority to release or withhold funds for capital spending to enforce his earlier decisions. Nevertheless, his control is still largely negative in nature and manifests itself in the form of reductions. But even this strength does not extend to all segments of the budget. He has little practical ability to control the budgets of other elected state officers, expenditures financed by special funds such as activities where the federal government is a participant, or expenditures automatically authorized by statutory formulae, such as aid to local school districts.

The final hurdle for agency requests is the General Assembly, which is largely ineffective for a number of reasons; it is too large and unwieldy, law-making is a part-time activity for most members, there is little time for consideration since appropriation bills are not typically introduced until sometime after mid-April; there is an attitude that their responsibility has already been performed by the Budgetary Commission, and appropriation bills are not presented according to the format and classifications used in the budget. According to the author, legislative hearings are simply a ritual, a detour through which bills must go, and their ultimate approval in the form presented is virtually assured.

The author then reviewed the role of each of the participants in decision making, their interaction with each other, and concluded that, in this aspect of the state government, there is a system with a character and identity of its own separate and apart from any of the participants, and that the expenditure of State money is governed by the system much more than by its human cogs. The system is internally immutable because of the required interaction and automatic responses of the various participants; that is, one element in the system cannot change without change in the others

and there is no force within the system with the potency to cause change in all members simultaneously.

Two recent efforts to achieve change were then analyzed and the causes of their failure were tentatively isolated. In the end, Mr. Anton predicted that the system can be changed only by some external influence, such as a financial crisis which makes it a matter of necessity, or the emergence of some potent, but unidentified, political movement.

The whole process of financial decision-making in Illinois is best epitomized by the author in the following statement: "Budgeting, in brief, is a rational process, whereas financial decision-making in Illinois is the result of a social process in which rationality is only sometimes apparent."²

On the whole, this book is a valuable contribution to the lore of state government. Its factual reporting is comprehensive within the somewhat narrow range of the study. It presents data heretofore unknown, and unavailable, to most people. In fact, one is led to wonder whether any single individual, including the above participants, have been aware of the total picture. Its admittedly tentative conclusions can serve as a frame of reference for further study. The unfortunate thing about this book is that the author's writing ability does not match his research ability; it is often tedious to read and he has a distressing tendency to lapse into a pseudo-intellectual jargon that tends to dull the senses of the reader. Nevertheless, the reader who is interested in the State government will be well rewarded and this book is deserving of a wider audience than it will probably receive.

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² P. 252.

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